

The Navy Nurse Corps:
Eighty Years of Service, Professionalism and Spirit
by
Lieutenant Commander Margaret Barton, NC, USN

What makes the Navy Nurse Corps and its over 3100 active duty membership so unique? How does the Navy Nurse differ from his or her civilian counterpart? Why remain in the Navy Nurse Corps? Why encourage others to join? These and other questions were asked of a group of active duty Nurse Corps officers stationed throughout the United States. Although their clinical interests, educational backgrounds, individual ranks and current assignments vary, each officer's response carried with it a common theme, namely; "The personal and professional benefits of the Navy Nurse Corps remain unequalled."

After working as a civilian nurse for almost two years upon graduation from a baccalaureate nursing program, Lieutenant Kathleen Pierce decided on a commission in the Nurse Corps. Following her initial tour at Naval Hospital, San Diego, Lieutenant Pierce was sent to Naval Hospital, Okinawa, Japan where she worked as a staff nurse in the intensive care unit. Shortly after being transferred to Naval Hospital, Oakland, Lieutenant Pierce was selected to accompany the USNS Mercy on its humanitarian cruise throughout the Pacific where she served as charge nurse of one of four, 20-bed intensive care units. Upon her return to Naval Hospital, Oakland Lieutenant Pierce was first assigned as the assistant charge nurse of the intensive care unit and in January of this year, became the charge nurse. Comparing her nursing experiences thus far with those encountered by civilian nurses she knows, Lieutenant Pierce feels that many of her civilian colleagues

are already experiencing "burn-out" and leaving the profession. "What I like most about the Navy Nurse Corps has been the many opportunities provided which allow me to share my knowledge. I have greatly appreciated the fact that my opinion as a registered nurses ~~matters~~ and that I have direct input into the care of the wide variety of patients we see. The Navy has allowed me to grow; to develop myself further not only as a nurse but as a Naval officer." When asked what her Eightieth Anniversary message is for the Navy Nurse Corps, Lieutenant Pierce stated; "We as a professional group have accomplished a great deal over the years, and of course, have much more to achieve. Many times, we do not see the impact of our work . . . how our work touches others. My experiences on the hospital ship taught me a lot about our worth as members of the Navy health care delivery team. Although "negativism" on the part of others is really easy to absorb right now, it is also the easiest path to take. All of the friends I have made, all of the things I have accomplished pretty much balance out the "bad days" for me."

Following a three year tour on active duty in the Air Force Nurse Corps, Lieutenant (junior grade) Harrell resigned her commission and worked as a civilian nurse for several months. Dissatisfied with what she perceived as a lack of camaraderie in the civilian nursing sector, Lieutenant (Junior grade) Harrell took the advice of several Navy Nurse Corps friends and joined their ranks. Since last December, Lieutenant (junior grade) Janice Harrell has served on active duty in the Navy Nurse Corps and currently works as a staff nurse on an orthopedic ward at Naval Hospital, Camp Pendleton. Commenting on her present work

environment, Lieutenant (junior grade) Harrell states; "There is such a sense of pride here. It comes from working with such good people!" Prepared at the baccalaureate level in nursing, Lieutenant (junior grade) Harrell has returned to school on a part-time basis and taken classes towards completion of a Masters degree in Health Care Administration. Excited about the possibility of going overseas following her current assignment, Lieutenant (junior grade) Harrell would like to gain additional experience in either the intensive care unit or emergency department. Lieutenant (junior grade) Harrell's Eightieth Anniversary message to the Navy Nurse Corps is brief and to the point; "Stick with the Navy, you can't go wrong. Not only are we having an adventure, we are leading one as well."

Convinced that her 7 years experience as a "seasoned civilian RN" could and would be best utilized by the Navy Nurse Corps, Lieutenant JoAnn Critelli decided to join the Navy. Initially assigned to Bethesda Naval Hospital, Lieutenant Critelli worked on a neurosurgical ward, a medical-surgical ward then the emergency room and clinics area. Currently assigned as a staff nurse in the intensive care unit at Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Lieutenant Critelli also works as relief night supervisor, quality assurance coordinator, and schedule coordinator. "The wonderful thing about the Navy Nurse Corps is that you find yourself in a variety of settings, on the receiving end of a multitude of experiences. I have never felt bored, slighted, or underchallenged. My supervisors and co-workers listen to one another's ideas which makes me feel good. I like the idea of role modeling and leadership development being important and encouraged

in the Nurse Corps - I did not find this to be the case in my civilian nursing experiences." Certified in Advanced Trauma Life Support and Emergency Room Nursing, Lieutenant Critelli hopes to one day serve aboard a hospital ship or be a Corps school instructor. Lieutenant Critelli's Eightieth Anniversary message to her fellow Nurse Corps officers is; "Birthdays are for celebrating. Each and every Navy Nurse should take a minute and examine the special uniqueness of their chosen career. It takes a highly motivated, technically skilled, and honestly dedicated professional to meet the exciting challenges that the Navy provides. Nothing equals the pride and sense of accomplishment experienced knowing that the highest level of nursing care is being delivered on a daily basis by each and every Nurse Corps officer."

As a clinical instructor for the emergency department and 13 of the ambulatory care clinics at Naval Hospital Bethesda, Lieutenant Commander Debra Janikowski willingly admits to "keeping busy" with implementing the orientation and in-service programs for all nursing service personnel assigned to these areas. A "veteran" Nurse Corps officer of 12 years, Lieutenant Commander Janikowski worked as a civilian RN for almost two years before deciding to join the Navy. "Twelve years ago, the upward mobility for nurses was not that great in civilian nursing and the pay was not much better. I originally came into the Nurse Corps for the experience, the travel and the schooling. I also came in for the increased responsibilities and accountability. I think that there are more jobs available for nurses now on the outside, but I still feel that the recognition, responsibility and accountability continues to be greater in the Navy Nurse Corps." Prior to coming to Bethesda, Lieutenant Commander Janikowski was assigned to an operational

billet for 14 months with the Third Force Service Support Group in Okinawa, Japan. "My ultimate goal is to return to operational nursing after completing a master's degree in trauma/emergency nursing. This is my primary interest and it is where I feel that I can contribute the most in meeting the mission of the Navy Nurse Corps." On her own time, Lieutenant Commander Janikowski has been attending school and last year was selected for full-time duty under instruction to complete the requirements for a baccalaureate degree in nursing. Lieutenant Commander Janikowski's Eightieth Anniversary message to the Navy Nurse Corps is this; "In light of the fact that we are facing difficult times in terms of limited resources and decreased promotion opportunity, I think that we each need to support one another to facilitate the unity and spirit that has existed throughout our history. This is essential for the continuation of the Nurse Corps. I am optimistic that our future is a promising one. We can't wash our hands of the problems and turn away - the problems that we face are simply not going to disappear that easily. We simply must work more closely together and continue to give our usual 110%!"

Nominated 10 years ago by her command to be featured in an U. S. Navy Medicine article about the Navy Nurse Corps, Lieutenant Commander Nancy Owen was characterized then as having a "unique ability to inspire peers and subordinates to increase their knowledge and skill and function to the fullest extent of their potential." Having served in the Nurse Corps for 15 years, Lieutenant Commander Owen is presently assigned to the Naval Hospital in Philadelphia where she works as the department head for ambulatory care nursing. Lieutenant Commander Owen began her Naval

career at Naval Hospital Charleston and was subsequently assigned to Naval Hospital's Portsmouth and Subic Bay. Following her tour overseas, Lieutenant Commander Owen was assigned full-time duty-under-instruction to complete her baccalaureate nursing degree, and was then assigned to the Naval Hospital in San Diego prior to coming to Philadelphia. "At the time I entered the Nurse Corps, I focused heavily on developing my clinical nursing skills in a variety of patient care areas. After I went back for my baccalaureate degree, I felt I had brought my knowledge level up to match those particular skills and so I began to concentrate on developing myself in a specialty area. For me, that was coronary care nursing. While working as charge nurse of the coronary care unit at Naval Hospital, San Diego, I obtained my critical care certification and my advanced cardiac life support certification." As department head of ambulatory care nursing at Naval Hospital, Philadelphia, Lieutenant Commander Owen feels she has had the opportunity to further develop her administrative and managerial skills. Because of the "ups and downs" that the hospital has been through over the past few years, Lieutenant Commander Owen also has the rather unique collateral duty assignment as public affairs officer. Selected once again for full-time duty under instruction, Lieutenant Commander Owen will be returning to school to earn her master's degree in critical care nursing. "It has always meant a lot to me to have a supervisor with the knowledge, experience and educational background in the area that I was working. It adds to their credibility and allows them to really serve as a resource for their staff. I hope to be that kind of person when I complete my graduate program." Lieutenant Commander Owen's Eightieth Anniversary message to the Nurse Corps is two-fold;

"The basis for our existence continues to be the patient. Regardless of our technical training and clinical expertise, the most important act we carry out is our one-to-one contact with that patient. I would wish that all Navy Nurses and corpsmen remember this very fundamental point. I would also encourage more junior Nurse Corps officers to stay in and persevere the "rough times" we currently face in terms of promotion opportunities. I feel that Navy nursing is an excellent career choice. We are held in high esteem by others both inside and outside our organization because of our clinical competence and leadership abilities. I would encourage others to "hang in there" as there are many rewards to be found in the Nurse Corps."

Lieutenant Doris Safran originally entered the Navy in 1970 as an enlisted women. After completing operating room technician school and working as an operating room technician, Lieutenant Safran was accepted into the Navy Enlisted Nursing Education Program (NENEP), and was sent to a baccalaureate nursing program to complete her basic degree in nursing. Following her first tour as an officer at Naval Hospital Portsmouth, Lieutenant Safran was stationed at Naval Hospitals Philadelphia and Keflavik, and Naval Medical Clinic, Quantico. Currently assigned to Naval Hospital, Jacksonville, Lieutenant Safran works as the charge nurse of the operating room where she oversees 7 nurses and approximately 25 operating room technicians. While stationed at Naval Hospital, Jacksonville, Lieutenant Safran has completed a master's degree in health care administration and was selected for Lieutenant Commander. "I joined the Navy approximately 18 years ago for the educational benefits, the travel opportunities and because I wanted

to serve my country. I sought out the Nurse Corps because the dual role of being an officer *and* a nurse has always appealed to me. This in itself requires the development of a broad range of skills and knowledge. The fact that Navy nurses are viewed as a more integral part of the health care delivery team was also very appealing. Navy nurses are *expected* to be leaders, teachers, and role models at an early stage in their professional development. Civilian nursing colleagues talk to me about their quest to be treated as professionals. We have already achieved this in the Navy Nurse Corps." Lieutenant Safran's Eightieth Anniversary message to the Nurse Corps is; "Just as the Navy Nurse Corps is growing and maturing, so should each individual Navy nurse. I would hope that none of us waste the many unique opportunities available to us as Nurse Corps officers and that we take responsibility for our own professional growth and development. We need to guide, encourage, counsel and support one another and those we lead so that all can continue to grow and develop as vital, contributing members of the Navy health care delivery team."

Lieutenant Commander Todd Herzog describes himself as a product of the Navy Enlisted Nursing Education Program following a four year enlistment as a Navy Corpsman. After approximately 7 years of working both stateside and overseas as an intensive care unit staff nurse and charge nurse, Lieutenant Commander Herzog applied for the Nurse Anesthetists Program. Following completion of the didactic portion of this program at George Washington University and the clinical training portion at Portsmouth Naval Hospital, Lieutenant Commander Herzog was assigned as a staff nurse anesthetist at Portsmouth and then as assistant clinical coordinator for nurse anesthesia school at the same facility.

In addition to various TAD assignments aboard aircraft carriers, part of Lieutenant Commander Herzog's assigned duties as a member of the anesthesia department at Portsmouth, was that of fleet anesthesia readiness officer. This involved evaluating the appropriateness and capabilities for anesthesia service aboard various Naval vessels including LHA's and LPH's. "Both this collateral duty and that of clinical coordinator for nurse anesthesia school were very challenging and most rewarding for me." Following his tour at Portsmouth Naval Hospital, Lieutenant Commander Herzog was assigned for 14 months to the USS Nimitz and deployed with this carrier to the Mediterranean. When the USS Nimitz arrived at Bremerton, Lieutenant Commander Herzog transferred to the Naval Hospital to serve as a staff nurse anesthetist. "My anesthesia career in the Navy has been truly rewarding personally and professionally. I have received a great deal of support from fellow Nurse Corps officers and physicians. What I would like to convey as part of my Eightieth Anniversary message to the Nurse Corps is this; every nurse needs to make a firm, highly regarded decision as to what they want to do, what avenues they need to explore, and professionally what they need to do to prepare themselves for what it is they want. Goal-setting, hard work and tenacity are essential. Admittedly, luck and timing have a little to do with it as well. I think that people make their own way in the Navy Nurse Corps. If there is something you want, you must set a goal and work very hard to achieve it. The bottom line is that nobody in the Nurse Corps, in the Navy, or in life for that matter is going to hand you anything on a silver platter. The Navy will provide the opportunities, but ultimately it is up to the individual."